

Tell me why hume
believes that thesis
(2) is true



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David Hume's Reasons to Believe In what is commonly referred to as David Hume's Thesis 2, the theorist claims that "causal relations are not knowable a priori (apart from experience), but only by inference from past experiences." In other words, everything we know about the relationships between cause and effect is built upon other things we have learned about these relationships through previous experience. To prove this point, Hume analyzes the processes of thought and understanding, tracing how each idea is formed by knowledge of previous experience.

He begins his argument by dividing thought into two major categories - ideas and impressions. As we grow, we gain information about the world around us through our senses. These simple impressions of the world cause corresponding simple ideas. A burning feeling in our finger leads to the simple idea of 'don't touch that.' These simple ideas are gathered as we grow. We may understand not to touch that if we don't want to feel burning in our finger. We may also understand that hot food comes from that place, that that place is called stove and that stove is only burning if the top is red. These several simple ideas combine together to form complex ideas - don't touch the top of the stove when it's red because that means it is hot and will burn our finger. This type of sequential connection of impressions is essentially the evidence of memory. A group of memories, each themselves a collection of impressions, can then combine to create impressions of even more complex concepts which may include ideas of family, education or religion among other things.

This is possible because these impressions can also be connected in non-sequential forms that comprise imagination. For example, the earlier memory of the burning stove might be translated into a red spiral skirt

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placed on a dancer as she twirls about a stage in an energetic dance celebrating summer. Imagination is necessary in order to develop these complex thoughts into complete ideologies by which one might live their life. For example, Hume indicates in this argument that God himself is a complex idea formed from simple ideas caused by simple impressions. Although the idea of God was sufficient proof for Descartes, Hume suggests that this idea does not require or prove that God truly exist.

Our impressions, whether they are in the form of simple ideas, memories or imagination, become attached to words that we use to help us recall these impressions. However, these thoughts are always qualified with specific details. We may see something that is round and red and large enough to fit in the palm of the hand, but this not enough information for us to determine whether it is an apple, a tomato, a pomegranate, a ball or any number of other possibilities until we compare yet further qualities with objects we are aware of from our past that help us to classify this specific object within the realm of known entities and thus assign it a word of its own. It is through this type of analysis that Hume proves, at least to himself, that his belief stated in thesis 2 is true.